



# LOOKING BACK

MONDAY MUSINGS AND MEMORIES

TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN PUTRA AL-HAJ



PUSTAKA ANTARA,  
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA.

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## FOREWORD

This engaging book contains 53 of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra's articles published fairly recently in *The Star* newspaper. They are partly an autobiography of a remarkable statesman, and partly a biography of the young years of the Malayan and later the Malaysian nation — for the Tunku played the leading part in their births and early growths. The book does not recount his own life story in chronological order, for its chief emphasis is on the development of Malaya and Malaysia. The earlier articles are therefore concerned with those historic events. In later articles the author looks back to his own childhood in Kedah, where his father was the Sultan, and to his boyhood, young manhood and early career inside and outside that State. They give fascinating glimpses of the way of life in the Malay States in the early decades of this century, recounting many events throughout the periods when he was a "naughty little boy" at school, a not wholly successful undergraduate in England (because he was more inclined to enjoy play than to suffer work), a youthful and rather frustrated government officer in Kedah, and a very courageous loyal Malay official during the cruel Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore during the World War.

When British Imperial rule was restored there after the war he decided that his so far rather unpromising career had little chance of even modest success unless he could pass the law examination which he had failed to do twenty-five years earlier in England. He therefore returned to London to become once more a student, at the age of 43. This time he succeeded, and was called to the Bar in the Inner Temple. He returned to Malaya, and filled some moderately important posts in the Attorney-General's and the Chief Justice's Departments.

Then the miraculous revolution in his life occurred. In 1951 a crisis arose in the United Malays National Organisation. The members of that extremely important political party suddenly lost their leader, and needed a new one. Providence smiled on the man who possessed the great qualities required in that Man of Destiny — Tunku Abdul Rahman. He was chosen as UMNO's new leader. Allah be praised!

The previous leader was Datuk Onn bin Ja'afar. I knew him well, because through several years I had worked very closely with him during the negotiations which changed the Malayan Union into the Federation of Malaya and in various subsequent tasks, including the often very difficult discussions in the Communities Liaison Committee where he as leader of the Malays, Tan Cheng Lock as leader of the Malayan Chinese, and the leaders of the Indian and other different racial communities laid the foundations of the harmonious co-operation between those previously rather discordant groups which enabled a multi-racial Malayan nation to be eventually formed. His and their great work is little known because the Committee was an unofficial body, and all its meetings — which continued throughout two years — were held in private.

Datuk Onn was a dynamic, courageous and almost always wise man, but sometimes he became too self-assured and stubborn in his views. The Tunku rightly pays high tribute to him as the creator of UMNO, but refers to the crashing mistake that he made in 1951. Soon after the Communities Liaison Committee had reached unanimous agreement on all the problems which its variegated members examined concerning the political, economic and other relations which should exist between the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other peoples as partners in a united Malayan nation Datuk Onn thought that they should abolish their separate ethnic parties such as the United Malays National Organisation, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress, and join together in one political party. One evening in a private talk with me he told me of his idea, and sought my opinion, probably expecting me to agree with it. I did not. I expressed the view that he was trying to go "too far too fast", and that a great majority of the Malays would wish to keep their own UMNO free from any non-Malay members, so that they could pursue whatever policies they wished without undue influence from non-Malays. I added that probably at some time in the distant future, if co-operation between the different racial groups developed well in the meantime, a political party in which they all joined could be formed, but that for the present the best chance of their friendly co-operation continuing was for the UMNO, MCA and MIC to remain separate parties collaborating in some sort of coalition together.

Datuk Onn disagreed, saying that he would carry a great majority of the UMNO members with him. So he launched his plan — with the consequences that the Tunku relates in "Looking Back".

The Tunku was elected as the new President of UMNO. It was a wonderfully happy choice. For the next almost eighteen critical years